

Message Text

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TAGS:PFOR, MARR, UK
SUBJECT: PRESS BRIEFING: FEBRUARY 4

1. WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE BY DAN MORGAN (TEXT TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL) WAS SUBJECT OF LENGTHY EXCHANGE AT FEBRUARY 4 PRESS BRIEFING. FOLLOWING IS TRANSCRIPT OF EXCHANGE:

QTE:
Q. GEORGE, CAN YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE STATE OF US-BRITISH RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY WITH REFERENCE TO THE POST STORY THIS MORNING, BASED ON OR REFERRING TO THE SECRETARY'S REPORTED ANGER OVER BRITISH RESERVATIONS REGARDING THE USE OF THE SR-71 FROM MILDENHALL?

A. YES. WITH REGARD TO THAT STORY, TO PICK OUT A FEW POINTS THERE WHICH I THINK WOULD BE USEFUL--AS FAR AS THE SR-71 STORY AND THE REPORT THAT WE WERE CONSIDERING CANCELING THE INTELLIGENCE EXCHANGE WHICH HAS GONE ON FOR MANY
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YEARS WITH THE BRITISH, OF EACH OF THOSE TWO I WOULD SAY THEY ARE INACCURATE, AND I WOULD LIKE TO PUT IT ON THE RECORD THAT WE ARE DENYING THEM.

ON THE CHARACTERIZATION OF LORD CROMER, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR THAT THE SECRETARY HAS A HIGH RESPECT

FOR HIM, THEY WORKED EASILY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY TOGETHER, AND HE SAW LORD CROMER QUITE FREQUENTLY, AND MUCH MORE FREQUENTLY THAN MANY OTHER AMBASSADORS. IN OTHER WORDS, THEIR RELATIONSHIP WAS AN EASY, CONSTRUCTIVE, MUTUALLY RESPECT ONE.

NOW--MBFR AND CSCE--THE STORY GOES INTO THAT. I WOULD ONLY SAY THAT THE POSITION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO THESE TWO CONFERENCES IS ONE THAT HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR NOT A MATTER OF WEEKS OR MONTHS, BUT YEARS. AND THESE ARE ATTITUDES IN RELATION TO VERY DETAILED AND INVOLVED AGENDAS ON THESE TWO CONFERENCES. AND I HAPPEN TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN ONE OF THOSE CONFERENCES FOR A YEAR. THE FACT THAT WE AND THE BRITISH AND OTHER ALLIES HAD DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONFERENCE DID NOT MEAN THAT WE HAD DIFFICULTY IN WORKING TOGETHER AS A HARMONIOUS TEAM. AND I CAN SAY THAT FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN ONE OF THEM, AND I KNOW PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THE OTHER.

AS FOR A FURTHER POINT, WHICH IS A QUOTE ATTRIBUTED TO THE TIMES, THAT THE STOPOVERS OF THE SECRETARY WERE REGARDED AS TIRESOME AND DISCOURTEOUS, I BELIEVE I AM CORRECT IN SAYING, JUST TO MAKE SURE THE REFERENCE IS ACCURATE, THAT THAT IS A QUOTE FROM A COLUMNIST WITHIN THE TIMES, NOT AN EDITORIAL OF THE TIMES, AND I WOULD WANT TO MAKE THE RECORD VERY CLEAR ON THIS ONE.

THE FIRST TIME THE SECRETARY STOPPED THERE AND SAW SIR ALEC IT WAS AT THE SPECIFIC REQUEST AND INVITATION OF SIR ALEC. ON THE SECOND STOP, AS THOSE OF US WHO WERE ON THE TRIP WILL RECALL, THE SCHEDULE WAS HECTIC AND DELAYED. THE TIMING WAS LATE WHEN WE GOT THERE. AND IN PREPARATION FOR THAT PARTICULAR TRIP, THE SECRETARY
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VOLUNTERRED TO STOP AND LEFT IT TO UK DISCRETION AS TO WHETHER THEY WOULD LIKE TO HAVE HIM AND WHO THEY WOULD LIKE TO HAVE CONSULT WITH HIM ON THE EVENTS THAT HAD HAPPENED. SIR ALEC HIMSELF CAME OUT, AND THEY HAD A VERY USEFUL EXCHANGE.

THE POINT I WOULD EMPHASIZE IS THAT THIS HAS ALL BEEN A PART OF A PATTERN OF INTENSE CONSULTATION WITH THE BRITISH WHICH WE HAVE CARRIED ON AT EVERY INSTANCE WHEN WE CAN--WHETHER IT WOULD BE THROUGH AMBASSADORS IN CAPITALS OR TRAVELLING AS RAPIDLY AS WE ARE. AND ALLOF THIS HAS

BEEN DONE BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO US-UK CONSULTATION. AND I MIGHT SAY THAT IN ALL OF OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE BRITISH, THEY SEEM TO HAVE VIEWED IT IN THE SAME WAY.

SO TO SUM UP, SINCE YOU ASK THE QUESTION, I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY THAT I REALLY DO NOT THINK THAT THE FACTS TODAY BEAR OUT THE THRUST OF THAT PARTICULAR STORY. AND I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE IT THAT WAY.

Q. GEORGE, JUST A TECHNICAL POINT. DID HE SEE SIR ALEC THAT FIRST STOP AT MILDENHALL? I THOUGHT YOU HAD TOLD US HE SAW BRITISH OFFICIALS, BUT SIR ALEC--

A. THIS WAS AN IN-BETWEEN STOP. MILDENHALL WAS SOME DISTANCE FROM LONDON, AND TWO SENIOR OFFICIALS FROM THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE CAME OUT, AND WE HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM THERE.

Q. ON THE FIRST TRIP YOU SAW HIM AND THEN AGAIN ON THE THIRD.

A. YES.

Q. MR. VEST, WHEN YOU DESCRIBED THE POST STORY AS INACCURATE IN RELATION TO THE SR-71, CAN YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC? DID THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT APPROVE THE USE OF MILDENHALL FOR THESE FLIGHTS AND--WELL, THAT IS THE FIRST QUESTION.

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A. LET ME JUST PUT IT VERY BLUNTLY ON SR-71 AND OTHER INTELLIGENCE MATTERS. NO, I CANNOT BE MORE SPECIFIC ON INTELLIGENCE MATTERS.

Q. WELL, CAN I JUST ASK ONE MORE QUESTION, THEN. YOU SAY THE STORY IS INACCURATE. THE THRUST OF THE STORY IS THAT DR. KISSINGER DECIDED NOT TO USE MILDENHALL FOR THESE FLIGHTS. THAT IS THE FACT THAT YOU ARE SAYING IS-- THAT IS PART OF THE STORY, IS IT, THAT YOU ARE SAYING IS INACCURATE.

A. I WILL NOT GO INTO THE STORY AT ALL. I JUST SAY THE STORY IS NOT ACCURATE. AND I WOULD RATHER NOT GO INTO IT ANY FURTHER. BUT IT IS NOT ACCURATE, AND THAT IS OUR POSITION.

Q. DO YOU DENY ALSO THAT THERE WAS NEVER ANY SUGGESTION OF A REVIEW OF THE EXCHANGE OF INTELLIGENCE, TECHNICAL INTELLIGENCE DATA, BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS?

A. I AM SAYING THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF THAT IS INACCURATE AS WELL, YES.

Q. COULD YOU DESCRIBE--COULD YOU CHARACTERIZE--YOUR CHARACTERIZATION OF--

A. US-UK RELATIONS?

Q. NO--THE BRITISH POLICY DURING AND AFTER THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT.

A. I DON'T THINK I HAVE THE TIME AND PLACE TO DO THAT HERE. I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE THIS STORY IN THIS CONTEXT. THE STORY IS WRITTEN IN TODAY'S CONTEXT. AND IN TODAY'S CONTEXT, I THINK SIMPLY THAT THE FACTS DO NOT BEAR OUT THE STORY. WE ARE WORKING ON A BROAD BASIS OF CONSULTATION WITH THE BRITISH ACROSS THE BOARD TODAY. AND I THINK THAT AS SUCH, THAT IS AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP. AND I THINK THAT IS WHY I HAVE SAID WHAT I HAVE ABOUT THE STORY.

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Q. GEORGE, AS A QUESTION FOR SOME RECONCILIATION, THE SECRETARY OF STATE, SEVERAL SPOKESMEN FROM THIS PODIUM, SEVERAL SPOKESMEN FROM THE PODIUM OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, HAVE ISSUED QUITE STRONG CRITICISMS OF US-EUROPEAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS. AND I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU HOW YOU RECONCILE THOSE PREVIOUS STATEMENTS WITH WHAT YOU ARE SAYING NOW.

A. YOU HAVE VERY NICELY PUT THE TERM QTE OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS END QTE. I AM SAYING THAT THIS STORY, AS I READ IT, IS GEARED TO THE PRESENT SITUATION AND IS NOT AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF THE PRESENT SITUATION.

Q. ARE YOU SAYING THAT THIS WAS A TEMPEST THAT HAS BLOWN OVER, OR THAT THERE WAS NO TEMPEST AT ALL? IT SEEMS TO ME YOU ARE SAYING THE FIRST THING, IS THAT CORRECT?

A. I AM SAYING THAT THE FACTS IN THE STORY AS I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GO INTO THEM DO NOT IN THEMSELVES BEAR OUT THE THESIS.

Q. YOU ARE ALSO LEAVING THE IMPLICATION, ARE YOU NOT, THAT IF THIS STORY HAD APPEARED SIX WEEKS AGO, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE MAIN ACCURATE.

A. NO, I WOULDN'T AGREE WITH THAT.

Q. THAT IS THE IMPRESSION YOU ARE LEAVING.

A. WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT IS THAT THE MAJOR PORTION OF THE STORIES THAT WERE CRITICAL OF US-UK RELATIONSHIPS, THE MAJOR NUMBER OF INCIDENTS THAT YOU CAN POINT TO, WERE STATEMENTS MADE THAT GO BACK TO LAST AUTUMN AND EARLY LAST WINTER. AND I DO NOT THINK IN THE PERIOD PARTICULARLY SINCE THE NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING, WHICH IS NOT SIX WEEKS, BUT A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO, THAT I DO NOT THINK SINCE THAT TIME YOU COULD MAKE THIS CHARACTERIZATION OF US-UK RELATIONSHIPS.

Q. OKAY, GEORGE, IF WE CAN PURSUE IT A LITTLE BIT--SEPA-
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RATING IT OUT, US RELATIONS WITH EUROPE, AND THE FACT THAT THINGS MAY HAVE GOTTEN SWEETER THAN THEY WERE, CAN WE TALK ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST STORY TO BRING UP THE QUESTION OF DIEGO GARCIA. ALSOP WROTE A MUCH STRONGER COLUMN ALONG THESE LINES, SAYING THE BRITISH ARE BALKING, THEY REFUSE TO HELP THE US IN PROVIDING THIS BASE.

A. I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY PROBLEM ON THE DIEGO GARCIA.

Q. NO. THE BRITISH ARE ACCOMMODATING--

A. WE HAVE NOT REACHED THE FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON IT, AND I EXPECT TO HAVE ONE.

Q. GOOD.

A. BUT I MEAN I AM NOT AWARE THAT WE ARE GOING TO RUN INTO THE KIND OF DIFFICULTY THAT YOU SEEM TO FEAR.

Q. WELL, ALSOP HAS WRITTEN THAT--BUT I DON'T HEAR IT MYSELF.

Q. HOW IMMINENT IS THAT ANNOUNCEMENT?

A. I CANNOT SAY HOW IMMINENT. BUT I AM NOT AWARE THAT THE TALKS ARE DUE TO BLOW UP.

Q. GEORGE, YOU SEEM TO BE DATING A SITUATION BETWEEN THE US AND BRITAIN FROM THE NATO MINISTERIAL, FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH WAS DECEMBER, AS I RECALL. WHAT ABOUT OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER? WHAT ABOUT THE SITUATION THEN?

A. I AM NOT GOING TO GET INVOLVED IN HISTORICAL EXEGESIS. BUT I DID WANT TO SAY--

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Q. WELL, BUT THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE DENYING HERE, IS ABOUT
OCTOBER.

A. LOOK--THE THRUST OF THE STORY IS THAT TODAY, AS I
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READ IT--IF I HAVE MISREAD THE STORY, ALL RIGHT--BUT
THE THRUST OF THE STORY IS TODAY, AND I THINK IT IS NOT
ACCURATE TO DESCRIBE OUR PRESENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THAT
CONTEXT.

Q. NO--BUT OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER--ARE YOU SAYING IN EF-
FECT--YOU ARE CERTAINLY INDICATING THAT OCTOBER AND
NOVEMBER THIS WAS THE SITUATION.

A. I AM NOT GOING TO DISCUSS THAT EARLIER PERIOD FOR
ONE REASON PA

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